TEMPERAMENT AND SOCIAL CLASS

By F. C. BARTLETT, M.A.

'Intelligence' tests and the apparent differences they reveal between social class and social class have for some time occupied an important part in eugenic studies. Mr. F. C. Bartlett, the writer of the following article, does not attach much value to them, chiefly on the ground that they demand "reactions which are now regarded as a part of the necessary equipment of all civilized people irrespective of their social status." He has recently been engaged with other psychologists in devising a technique for accurately assessing that deeper and probably more important human quality, 'temperament.' The following article, extracted from an address he gave to the Society on January 19, indicates the eugenic field opened by this work, further articles on which we hope to print from time to time.—Ed.

IN contemporary psychology 'temperament' has no agreed connotation. By it I mean that group of predisposing tendencies and feelings which may be used to characterize one person in contrast to another, and which seems to come to expression independently of special training due to the repetition of specific situations.

Thus I would regard *timidity, carefulness, capacity for foresight, executive ability, recklessness* as possible examples of temperamental tendencies or qualities. No complete list of such qualities and tendencies is possible at present or perhaps ever will be. But those I have named determine a man's attitude and responses towards any one of an indefinite number of situations rather than to any single specific situation. Some people lack them, some have them. They begin to find expression extraordinarily early in individual mental life, and they appear to be capable of singular persistence from generation to generation; they may thus be regarded as innate in the wide sense of the term.

Certain common expressions: 'The Governing Class,' 'Our Betters,' 'The Inarticulate Class,' might be held to indicate that they differentiate one social class from another. But these expressions may refer rather to persistent social institutions and traditions than to any endowment of relatively constant temperamental qualities and tendencies peculiar to a given social class. There is some definite basis for maintaining the existence of certain broad but important temperamental *racial* differences, but at present very little, if any genuinely sound evidence for maintaining constant temperamental differences between social classes within the social groups.

Nevertheless, I believe that if only we had a good way of determining temperamental qualities such evidence could be found. In any complex society a person is, as we accurately say, "born into" a particular social class. Now it is perhaps unlikely, though not impossible, that this fact itself tends to give him a certain characteristic temperamental endowment. But the mobility of modern society makes possible a considerable amount of shifting about from class to class in every generation. I wish we knew more about how this 'shifting' is effected. It ought to be a primary problem of the social psychologist to find out more about this. I believe that far the most important psychological factors are a man's endowment of temperament and 'interests.' I will come to the second in a moment or two.

Here is a man assertive, energetic, ardent, critical and questioning, optimistic so far as his own powers are concerned, dissatisfied, moderately pessimistic about the stability of his immediate social relations with other people. He will, unless external conditions are very overwhelmingly against him, inevitably gravitate towards high social rank. He will move towards the governing class. But in which particular direction he will go, in industry, in science,

in art, in religion, in the practical handling of men, in any one of a large variety of other special directions will depend psychologically in the main upon his *interests*. Not entirely, however, for his temperament must still play its part. For example, whether he is a staff or an executive officer, and if the latter what type of men he will handle best, are themselves primarily a matter of his temperament.

I am prepared to maintain that if we had a sufficiently accurate method of investigation we should find a significant statistical consistency of temperament among the members of a given social class, that this would be the more marked the more important the functions of the class in the general community, and that this temperamental consistency most certainly has an innate basis. How temperamental endowment is determined is a question to which I will presently return.

If this holds good of temperament it probably holds good equally or even more markedly with ' interests.' Here again is a term for which psychology has developed no universally accepted connotation. I must provide my own definition. An interest is, I think, a bias towards noticing certain things, thinking about certain things, acquiring certain skills. In it cognitive factors are always prominent. Temperament mainly determines *how* we face the varied situations of life; interest what we select from these situations to deal with, or with what class of situation among the many that life presents to us we shall be specially pre-occupied. Although psychologists dispute whether interests are innate even in the wide sense, I am myself strongly of the opinion that they are. We can see a bias towards the numerical, the æsthetic, or the mechanical aspects of things coming out very early indeed in the individual mental life. We seem to be able to trace them as appearing and re-appearing again and again in the history of particular families. They often seem to have a highly specialized form, as in interest in musical sound, in words, in architectural design, in executive management, in public affairs, in money.

It is true that every psychologist now knows that interests may appear to fluctuate considerably up to fairly late periods of individual growth. This is, I think, mainly because fleeting interests can be very easily manufactured by accident of environment. A boy will want to be now a carpenter, now an engine driver, now a motor mechanic, now a wireless operator. But there are always limits within which he revolves around from one interest to another, and if occasionally he breaks out of these limits he displays the most evanescent of all his interests. Nobody has seriously studied what determines the range of these fluctuations, but it is obvious that temperament and interest are closely related, and very likely it is the more persistent and stable temperament that sets the range of variation from one to another of the more volatile interests.

A very deep-seated broad difference of interest indeed is that between an interest in life, plant, animal, or human, and an interest in inanimate things. I do not know how, psychologically, to derive these from anything else. They are, however, profoundly important in shaping a man's career and his social status. Take our man of the ardent, critical, inquiring, analysing, somewhat assertive temperament. Let him be endowed with an interest in life but lack any keen bent towards the acquirement of wealth. He will move towards biological science of the academic type. Add to him an interest in money: he will be deflected towards biological application in industry, or to one of the humane professions. Let him have also the temperament that can understand or control men. He will push towards public administration and affairs, business executive, some technical branch of his country's Army or Navy services, politics. An unfriendly society may thrust upon him a life pre-occupied with things, with lifeless figures, paper schemes, inanimate material. He will remain unhappy, restless, and relatively inefficient because he cannot have his proper pleasure even in what he does well.

The combination of temperamental en-

dowment and innate interests may be an exceedingly complex matter in any man. But I am persuaded that more than any other psychological factors of individual constitution, this combination determines a man's social status and class. And I think it certain that owing to this if we compare the members of a given social class one with another, we may discover a uniformity of temperament and interest that are not to be found if we compare them with those belonging to any other class. If this is true we can certainly maintain that there are innate differences between social classes.

Perhaps we can get our best working notion of social class by considering that every fairly large community develops sub-groups which are arranged in a more or less orderly hierarchy of rank or of authority in the whole community. The basis of any group belonging to this hierarchy is always a social institution, and the latter is itself, of course, founded upon some deep-seated individual human tendency, such as marriage customs, or property, or traditions of governing, of professional or trade arrangements. Such sub-groups form the social classes. That they may be infinitely varied goes without saying. That they overlap in function and membership is equally obvious, and at the same time a matter for us of great importance. That they are not merely the possessors of certain institutions but the active guardians of relatively special functions must also not be overlooked for a moment.

There are two very striking things about all such social classes. The first is the remarkable permanence of the institutions which they possess, the customs which they practise, the traditions which they uphold. It is a permanence which goes far beyond any limits of individual length of life, and even withstands for a long time changes of individual opinion. The second is that nevertheless this permanence is not the fixed pose of profound torpor. It is dynamic. If we take any social class at any stage of its history we can see that its institutions, traditions, and customs display a certain trend or direction by consequence of which the life of the group from one time to another can be seen to be internally consistent and to possess a definite continuity.

Turn to the psychological side of this. It means that the individuals who belong to a given class in society are in some way predisposed to understand and accept the social possessions of that class. It means that they are predisposed also to assimilate readily the direction towards which those possessions are trending and to carry them further in the same line without abrupt break.

Of what nature are these predispositions? No doubt every normal man has a fairly strong endowment of social instincts. These help to make him ready to accept the institutions and traditions of his immediate group in society. But it is hard indeed to believe that they are all. In the first place the prized possessions of different social classes differ so radically and so widely that it seems extraordinarily unlikely that a mere common instinctive endowment should predispose men to assimilate them all with equal readiness. It seems impossible that it should be a common stock of social interests which causes men to rise to appreciation and partisanship of the social usages of a working miner's class, of a small shop-owning class, of a plutocratic financial class, and of a leisurely æsthetic class. And secondly there is the fact that the man 'born into' a social class and with a long tradition behind him of related members of that class tends to espouse and comprehend its possessions and functions with a loyalty and serenity unknown to the newcomer.

This *may* be due to longer individual experience: I cannot believe that it is. Everywhere in psychology we see that mere length or repetition of experience has very little to do with stability or genuine adaptiveness of reaction. Here is another matter that needs research. A man, by force of individual temperament, pushes into a social class and remains there, unhappy perhaps, a bit defiant, at best a little homesick for the social usages of the class from which he has emerged. His immediate descendants remain where he has set them, living upon his

prestige, or more often in the world we know, upon his money. But the third or fourth generation returns home again, and in them the interloper is back in his original class. We need to learn more about these social reversions. In Lancashire they say "Three generations from clogs to clogs." I think it highly likely that if we knew more about it we should find that the shifting from one social class to another—particularly the shifting upwards—is in the long run less marked than may appear if we study only a single generation or two generations.

Now if we have to push beyond the notion of a mere common stock of instinctive endowment, what are the hypotheses that we must use? In the first place it is highly probable that in different social groups the majority of the individuals concerned possess a different common arrangement of instinctive endowment. In one group one set of instinctive tendencies is relatively predominant; in another group a different set. This appears to be certainly the case in some instances. For example, if we study the various versions of popular stories current in different related groups of North American Indians we find some persistent and significant variations. The versions current in the northernmost part of the coast area tend to be dominantly concerned with greed or voraciousness, those of Vancouver Island and the delta of the Fraser river with sex, and those of the south-western interior of British Columbia with vain-gloriousness or boasting.

I believe that this principle of predominant tendency is capable of great extension. These factors, actively discriminating one group from another I wish to call "group difference tendencies." I have attempted to work out a part of their psychological implications in my book on *Psychology and Primitive Culture*.* I believe that they are not merely group factors objectively discoverable by a study of the institutions and traditions of a group, but that in some way they may actually work into individual mental life, and produce innate predispositions favouring the maintenance and development of specific class possessions. In one class, for long periods social governing tendencies are predominant, even in individual endowment; in another, submissive, accepting tendencies; in a third, manipulative tendencies specialized for particular crafts; in a fourth, bartering, trading, specialized acquisitive tendencies.

More than this; because, in any social group institutions and traditions grow very strong and very permanent, and pervade a great proportion of the social activities of its members, they, also, in some manner, pass into the mental constitution of the members and develop in them specialized *interests* which are innate in the sense in which I am using this term. So the persons born into that class are predisposed towards certain occupations, certain skills, a certain outlook upon life. I cannot at present prove this to be so, but I firmly believe that it is, and that it has much to do with that permanence of the social functions of different classes which is an undoubted fact of the life of groups as we find it in all ages.

We have then a double-sided process. In every generation and at every age individuals with an innate temperamental endowment and a fundamental bias towards certain interests gravitate towards certain special social classes. And then the very existence of these classes for long periods stamps into the individual mental life an innate arrangement of instinctive responses, an innate temperamental outlook, an innate group of interests. The first fact largely accounts for the diversity of social grouping as we find it, the second for the striking persistence of social classes.

* Cambridge: at the University Press. 1923. 8s. 6d. net.